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ABSTRACT

The American Field Service (AFS) has 3,500 volunteers throughout Australia. Local chapters recruit potential host families and participants. Host families are recruited actively and selectively while volunteers are recruited largely through AFS presentations at schools, through friends, and by returning volunteers. Due to a high level of demand for fundraising, difficulty in finding host families, and the current political debate in Australia concerning issues of multiculturalism and Asian immigration, tensions have risen within the organization, often as a result of geographic distances, regional rivalries, and the central management structure. Ten recommendations are made for the future of AFS in Australia, addressing specific needs, problems, and current concerns within the organization. Among the recommendations are: AFS should clarify the policies and goals, AFS should develop a corporate identity, and AFS should make volunteer training a priority. (NL)

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Summary of Findings from Australia

by Desmond Walsh & Margaret Helman Project Consultants
Bettina Hansel, Project Supervisor

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THE AFS VOLUNTEER RESOURCES STUDY

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Summary of Findings from Australia

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July 1989

Introduction: Voluntary Activity in Australia

The Australian way of life is to a significant extent underpinned and nourished by a huge and sustained commitment of unpaid time, energy, and expertise by people in all walks of life and at various points on the socio-economic scale. Though voluntary activity in Australia is largely undocumented, the authors feel that their investigation has only scratched the surface of the enormous amount of volunteer work that takes place in Australia. An Australian Bureau of Statistics estimate provided by the Volunteer Center of New South Wales indicates that some 27% of the population of that state is engaged in volunteer work.

The AFS Organization in Australia

AFS, like many other organizations in Australia, is an international organization with North American origins. Although AFS Australia seems to have a fairly high profile within the international organization, the organization is not particularly well-known within Australia. This is especially surprising in view of the length of time that AFS has operated in Australia and the extent of its operation.

AFS in Australia has an estimated 3,500 active volunteers across the nation. In addition to the huge commitment of time there is the hidden contribution of each volunteer. A board member has estimated that an active AFS volunteer contributes the equivalent of between $500 and $1,000 (Aus) per year through such things as phone calls, gasoline, and food and lodging for those being billeted for AFS events. The authors' consistent impression has been that this commitment is made not by the very wealthy or by people with endless time on their hands, but generally by people who have to work hard and watch their budgets.

The Australian Geographic and Regional Context

It is a commonplace of Australian government and society that there is a continual tug between "state's rights" and the prerogatives of the national interest. The tensions between regional concerns and the demands of a central government are maintained and often exacerbated by great distances and the perceived insensitivity and arrogance of

the heavily populated, heavily industrialized southern or eastern states (depending on the vantage point) versus the perceived selfishness and provincialism of the outlying states. Any national endeavor in Australia is subject, to a greater or lesser degree, to these region-related sources of tension in the general body politic. National volunteer organizations are no exception.

Because of the regional tensions, some Australian volunteer organizations operate on a decentralized formula with a regional paid staff member in each Australian state. An example of this is found in the Australian Bicentennial Authority, where the regional executive officer (a paid staff member) reported on a day-to-day basis to the volunteer regional chairperson (a member of the national board) and to the chief executive (national staff) on broad policy matters, conditions of service, and so on.

A variation of these tensions is to be found in the rivalries and resentments between city and country. Those who live in rural Australia perceive themselves as exploited and/or ignored by the city people and politicians. Though by far the majority of Australian people live in urban areas, it is interesting to note the traditional importance of volunteer activity in rural areas. The Country Women's Association is a very large and politically influential volunteer organization whose initial foundation was to improve the lives of rural women and help them overcome the isolation they faced. Another example are the volunteer fire-fighting organizations that are of critical importance in the Australian bush communities.

Motivations for Volunteering

In Australia, the term "volunteering" has certain historical, sociological, and class connotations that can militate against volunteer organizations in their efforts to recruit members and generally be taken seriously. Australians, especially those whose first language is Australian English, will know that the expression, "never volunteer," while often used in a jocular fashion, has an edge of seriousness. There are historical recollections of volunteering as being tantamount to being sycophantic and willing to be exploited. In the military, volunteering could mean increasing the chances of being killed. Despite numerous examples of heroic volunteering both within and outside of the military, there is in the usage of Australian English an overt or implicit disparagement of "volunteering."

By contrast, expressions such as "community involvement" or "lending a hand" have positive, worthy connotations. Yet the positive associations these terms have do not permit people in Australia to proclaim loudly that they are involved in the community. A more modest stance is still preferred; it is considered more appropriate to avoid any

mention of personal sacrifice and perhaps to indicate that you were talked into being involved and accepted "in a weak moment."

The question, "Why do people volunteer?" could also be phrased "How do people volunteer?" in that they are often unaware that they are "volunteering" when they first get involved in volunteer work. People may join an organization without apparently realizing what they are getting into.

Motivations for becoming involved in volunteer activities could be summarized as follows:

- The presence of community spirit
- The commitment to an organization with which one has a personal connection
- A good way to meet friends who are like-minded, share the same interests, gain a sense of community, etc.
- Altruistic concern for social change or individuals in need
- A desire for status, power, or influence
- A means to gain general or specialized work experience as a help to obtaining paid employment

Staying involved in a volunteer organization, however, seems to depend on different motivations that are related more to the way in which the organization is run than to its goals. For example, if having responsibility means continually moving up in the hierarchy of an organization, volunteers may not be able to maintain a long-term commitment. Leaders will drop out as soon as no higher level positions are available. An organization that recognizes the continued usefulness of its past office holders and offers them opportunities to continue to make a valuable contribution will be more likely to retain long-term volunteers.

A volunteer's longevity within an organization also depends on the ability of that organization to match volunteers' skills with responsibilities. A volunteer for Community Aid Abroad (an overseas aid organization) spoke appreciatively of the volunteer coordinator who had discussed with her the tasks the volunteer would like to do and the skills she could contribute. She was then given a responsible position that matched her needs and skills. Similarly, the Volunteer Centre of New South Wales asks volunteers to complete a one-page questionnaire to elicit information about skills, special interests, professional qualifications, other volunteer organization memberships, and "any areas of interest/work for the Centre in which you have not had the opportunity to become involved but would like to try." These efforts to find appropriate work for volunteers seem to pay off in long-term commitments to the organization.

Volunteers need to feel the benefit of their involvement, especially that the work they are doing is worthwhile and is contributing to the society. Organizations such as the Girl Guides that have traditionally depended on the volunteer labor of women at home are finding that women now have less time available and want to be sure that the time they give to an organization is well used. An organization that is poorly run or that does not make effective use of its volunteer force will soon find that force diminished.

How AFS Recruits Members

AFS in Australia does not generally operate with the specific idea of recruiting people to volunteer for the organization. Instead, AFS recruits two broad types of new members: potential participants and potential parents, both "sending" and "hosting." Typically AFS local chapters seek actively to recruit participants and host parents; parents of potential participants are not sought out but are seen to come as "part of the package" when their children apply to participate in the exchange programs. In the words of one AFS volunteer, this latter group is recruited "by sheer accident. All they did was to agree to let Johnny go away for three months and they find themselves caught for several years." Yet it is on this group of "accidentally" recruited people that AFS seems to rely most strongly to keep up its active membership numbers.

It also seems to be quite common practice for these unsuspecting parents to find themselves nominated to be office-bearers of chapters at a very early stage in their involvement. We suspect that, for many of these people, their commitment is predicated more by wishing to support their offspring than by any other motives. Our impression is that the accidental nature of their joining AFS does not prevent them from giving generously of their time and financial and other resources. On the other hand, it is hardly surprising that many of these people leave AFS as soon as they decently can after the return of their sons or daughters from their exchange program.

Host parents are recruited not only more actively but, given their anticipated responsibilities, more selectively. They, too, are likely to find that, having agreed to host a student, they are also expected to take on other responsibilities, sometimes quite onerous, in the chapter.

Potential program participants are recruited in a variety of ways. Some respond to an AFS presentation at school, some are drawn through their knowledge of AFS from friends or schoolmates, some through being members of families involved in AFS. Those who participated in the AFS program are expected to make a serious commitment to AFS and to remain involved after they return.

These returnees are in theory a highly valued group in AFS and the organization at every level sees them as an important source of future membership. However, there are for many returnees a number of real or perceived barriers to their full and active participation in AFS activities after their return from their programs. Inevitably, a number are lost to the organization.

How AFS Operations and Programs Affect Volunteers

Geographic Issues. AFS in Australia was founded as a federated body of state-based AFS groups. Regional and chapter level volunteers in general accept the idea that broad policies and procedures should be established at the national level, with sensitivity to regional differences. However, geographic constraints do affect the operations of AFS programs. For example, in New South Wales, a chairperson in the northern part of the state pointed out that it costs $80 just for the gasoline to make a round trip to Sydney, the State capital. If that money cannot be found, the local chapter is denied the opportunity to participate in regional workshops and meetings and therefore, the possibility of full participation in AFS. Even telephone communications over such distances are very expensive in Australia, which again hampers the abilities of rural chapters to become fully involved.

A procedure used in some regions is for the regional committee to meet on a rotating basis at various centers. The chapter in that center plays host to the regional committee, billetting them overnight and providing a social function where regional office-bearers can meet local volunteers. When such an exercise was observed, it was evident that it placed a burden of travel on regional committee members and an extra responsibility on local chapter people, but the benefits of regional office bearers being put in touch so directly with local concerns were also evident.

Demands on Volunteers. Among the volunteers interviewed in various organizations, most seemed to enjoy being involved. There were nevertheless signs of stress and anxiety among volunteers, particularly within AFS. The ideals and commitment of AFS volunteers are clearly high. They are enormously dedicated and unsparing of themselves. The dedication of these volunteers has allowed AFS to continue and to face new challenges successfully. But an overburdened volunteer force is a serious problem for any organization.

Some of this stress and anxiety can be attributed in part to the fact that AFS is an organization in a state of relatively rapid change in Australia as well as internationally. Some people who had been with AFS a long time were sanguine or even very positive about the changes taking place. Others were troubled by the changes and some had left the organization or in other ways gave signs of deep frustration that AFS seemed

no longer capable of giving them the satisfaction and enjoyment they had once experienced.

Some of the tensions we observed were attributed to a perceived higher level of demand for output, especially in terms of fundraising and finding host families. Related to this was a perception that the quality of the exchange experience was being sacrificed to numerical quotas imposed from outside the local chapter. Some volunteers also expressed reservations about the newer AFS programs involving the exchange of adult participants, and felt that AFS would do better to stick with "what it knows best," the high school student exchange.

Another organizational issue with relevance for volunteer commitment is the diversity of countries participating in AFS exchanges. While the AFS leadership is justifiably proud of the country diversity, this does not seem to be seen as a marketable advantage by the volunteers. While volunteers may also be proud of the high ideals for intercultural learning exemplified in the diversity of country participation, the current political debate in Australia about multiculturalism and evidence of renewed anxiety about or even hostility to Asian immigration may well place strain on the continuing commitment of AFS volunteers.

Inherent Problems in Human Service Organizations. Much of the frustration we observed among volunteers, including people with a long history of volunteer involvement, could be attributed to their not having enough information, expressed concisely and lucidly, about fundamental policies and procedures within the organization. Though geographic distances and regional rivalries do play a role in hampering communication, causes of communication difficulties may relate more to the nature of human services oriented volunteer organizations in general than with AFS or any other volunteer organization in particular, and may not be peculiar to Australia. An insight into this was provided by a journal article supplied by a former AFS volunteer.

"Domain Theory: An Introduction to Organizational Behavior in Human Service Organizations" by James M. Kouzes and Paul R. Mico, in the (U.S.) Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences (Vol. 15, No. 1, 1979, pp. 446-69) outlines theory of organizational behavior in human services organizations (HSOs). According to this theory, HSOs are made up of three distinct domains – the Policy Domain, the Management Domain, and the Service Domain. The authors maintain that each domain operates by different and contrasting principles, success measures, structural arrangements, and work modes, and that the interactions between these create natural conditions of dysfunction and discordance. This "paradigm of conflicting domains" is offered as a conceptual guide to organizational development in HSOs.

If the AFS International Trustees and the AFS Australia Board of Directors are considered to be the policy makers, the National Director and her paid staff the management team and the regional and chapter volunteers the service professionals, the following extract from the article is not too difficult to apply to AFS in Australia:

> "The policy makers have developed structures and work modes necessary to respond to the articulated needs of diverse communities. The managers have developed mechanisms to respond to their accountability for efficient use of resources and attainment of goals. The professionals have developed their own modes to respond to demands for quality care for their clients.
>
> "However, these very same principles, success measures, structures, and work modes that serve to organize integral domains, also serve to separate and disconnect the domains from each other. They promote separate identities – identities associated with the domains – and inhibit the development of a common view of the HSO. This phenomenon contributes to the destruction of a sense of coherence and connectedness in the entire organization." (pp. 457-59)

The authors go on to point out that the people in each domain collect the information they feel is needed for them to perform their own roles, "but in the process often selectively ignore or discount information available from other sources, thus frequently arriving at incompatible conclusions."

Broadly speaking, people in the policy and management domains responded with either frustration or resigned tolerance to suggestions that fund-raising requirements were unreasonable or not adequately explained and to suggestions that the Green Book, a guidebook for AFS volunteers, was unhelpful or inaccessible; whereas volunteers (the service domain for our purposes) expressed frustration that their objections on these matters did not appear to be taken seriously.

As the article suggests, such tensions may actually be exacerbated by the very fact that certain procedures and materials have been developed by people in the policy and/or management domains with the explicit aim of helping the people in the service domain. Further, the authors observe, "A strategy to improve the functioning of one domain may be at odds with the effective functioning of another." (p. 461)

It is argued that a condition for coming to grips with the implication of the inbuilt discontinuities expressed by the Domain Theory is to accept that, in such organizations, uncertainty is a constant. Accordingly, "rational, pragmatic, and computational approaches to problem solving tend not to work well." (p. 461) Solutions to the sorts of

problems illustrated by the Domain Theory will have to be characterized by "judgment, compromise, and inspiration." (p. 461) The problems will be exacerbated, not alleviated, by any one domain attempting to find solutions independently of the others.

Communication and Training. Communication of information sometimes takes the form of an overwhelming amount of paperwork. The increased capacity of the national and international offices of AFS to generate documentation through the use of sophisticated word processing technology threatens to increase the burden of paperwork for the AFS volunteers rather than improve communication and training. Thoughtful consideration of what is to be communicated and discipline in structuring and editing the messages are needed if volunteers are not to be swamped by the volume and complexity of paper communications.

A particular example in AFS is the Green Book. This comes in the form of a large, loose-leaf binder. It is sub-titled "Everything you ever wanted to know about AFS but never knew where to find it." The introduction describes the book as "intended for use by AFS Australia volunteers and staff in planning and implementing AFS intercultural learning programs throughout Australia."

The book, which is in very short supply, is essentially an indexed set of documents, in various styles and formats, about various aspects of AFS. There are stylistic indications of attempts to make the book user-friendly and there is a table of contents. However, the consultants found the Green Book cumbersome -- both physically and in presentation -- and lacking signs of overall editorial control. One of the basic problems is availability: while the answer to a question may be in the Green Book, the coordinator cannot seek or find that answer without going to the chapter chairperson for access to the book.

While the value and necessity of training for volunteers is recognized by AFS, the reality seems to fall significantly short of the ideal. There are at least three reasons for this.

First, even in organizations where everyone is engaged on a full-time, paid basis, real opportunities for training are often significantly fewer than good management requires. So it is inevitable that the difficulties will be greater where the people concerned are already busy with paid work and family responsibilities and have relatively little time or energy to devote to training in their volunteer work. Second, within AFS the problem is a function of the general neglect of volunteer management and development, which in turn is largely attributable to concentration on program management and the concomitant demands that makes on human and financial resources. Third, if the training of volunteers is to be effective it must be attuned to

the current needs and emerging responsibilities of the individual volunteers, and is therefore a complex and demanding task. This has not been a consistent priority within AFS, despite the stated necessity for training in publications such as the Green Book. In general, volunteer training at AFS suffers from a lack of any coherent and practical approach.

Recommendations for AFS in Australia

1. AFS should plan a three-to-five year systematic decentralization process that is clearly explained to the volunteers.

Our consistent impression was that AFS has a need for more decentralization and more emphasis on regional responsibility in the management of the organization. But while the national leadership sees this as a process of sharing responsibilities and resources in an imaginative and constructive manner, some volunteers in less populous centers see this as the national body handing over responsibilities that it can no longer handle without at the same time handing over the resources to manage the new regional responsibilities. It is necessary, therefore, that the decentralization process be articulated more clearly with a timetable over three or five years with identifiable target dates for the hand over of specific functions and responsibilities.

Such a decentralization plan may or may not include paid regional staff. This issue should be addressed at an early stage in the decentralization process. While there is some concern that a paid regional staff person would have to balance responsibilities to the region with those of the national organization, there are certainly advantages to regional management in having a paid person responsible. It is also a logical corollary of decentralization that regions wishing to allocate their resource to hiring paid staff should be authorized to do so.

Related suggestions are that AFS appoint regional volunteer coordinators and trainers. (See recommendation 4.)

2. AFS should consider broader categories of organizational "membership" to provide more opportunities to become involved in new ways, and to encourage volunteers to continue their involvement in AFS.

As AFS currently operates in Australia, the local chapter is the basic organizing unit for all volunteers. While this way of organizing has its value, it is unnecessarily limiting and may discourage large numbers of people from becoming involved with the organization. AFS should maintain a general membership list, not tied to active chapter membership, that could be coded to call on people with specific skills and inter-

ests. This would provide AFS with a mechanism for retaining the involvement of people committed to AFS but not involved in any chapter activities.
AFS needs to change the current connotation of AFS volunteer as "active member of a chapter and/or in a leadership position" to a much broader concept that would allow people to continue to be involved even after they leave their official post with the chapter. AFS needs to acknowledge the value of its past chairpersons and provide them with opportunities for other meaningful, responsible work in the organization. Because so many former volunteers are effectively lost to AFS, it is recommended that AFS organize a clearly articulated national campaign to re-recruit former volunteers.

Recruitment of volunteers in general should be more actively undertaken to obtain a wider variety of individuals. AFS seldom recruits volunteers outside of the participants and parents pool. In using chapter information nights only for potential AFS students and host families, AFS misses the opportunity to recruit volunteers from the wider community. Information nights should be used as a recruitment tool for volunteers as well as for participants. In general, though, AFS needs a new concept of how these people could fit into the AFS organization.

Women, who through paid work have gained confidence in their administrative or professional ability, will not be as accepting as before of the dominance of men in leadership positions of AFS or other organizations. A more positive view of the changed role of women as it affects volunteer organizations is that more and more women now bring professional and administrative skills to the service of voluntary organizations with which they choose to be involved.

While AFS might not see a need or relevance for affirmative action for women, we suggest that there is scope for the leadership to ensure that there is genuine equal opportunity. As an articulated policy, this could be used to help overcome the hesitation of women who might otherwise be resistant to becoming or remaining volunteers in the organization.

3. AFS should keep returnees involved by giving them ways to use their energy and commitment to benefit the organization.

The basic problem faced by young returnees is the problem faced by all young people in our society. The older generation expects them to be responsible but is pessimistic about their capacity to exercise responsibility in a consistent and effective manner. A persistent myth in AFS in Australia is that there is a "rule" that returnees cannot be office-bearers or occupy other responsible positions in a chapter until eighteen months or two years after their return. Australian returnees themselves acknowledge that many of them have real problems of adjustment when they return from their exchange

programs, but it was suggested that rather than seeing these problems as a reason for not giving returnees responsibility, chapters should help the returnees to adjust. One practical way of doing this, it was stated, was to give them responsibilities to fulfill.

The returnees are the group most likely to respond positively to the concept of lifelong AFS membership and most likely, as a group, to be susceptible to giving an extra degree of commitment because of the intense experience they have had, usually at an impressionable age.They have a special, personal experience of AFS as a force for intercultural understanding and even as a means of working to overcome the causes of war. AFS should be able to capitalize better on their special experience of the organization and what it can achieve.

Discussion about involving returnees tends to focus on the younger, more recently returned members of the group, but it is also desirable for the organization to identify ways of involving returnees of all ages.

4. In an effort to improve the placement of volunteers in appropriate roles and tasks, AFS should appoint National, Regional, and Chapter Volunteer Coordinators.

AFS takes understandable pride in its attention to detail in the placing of program participants with host families. The application of a commensurate degree of care and attention to detail in placing volunteers with suitable responsibilities would without doubt have a very positive influence on motivation and efficiency.

There is a need for at least one person to be appointed as National Volunteer Coordinator. Ideally, this would be a senior, full time position on the professional staff, but if that is deemed to be impracticable the position should be filled by a mature volunteer who is able to devote the equivalent of a five-day week to the task.

The National Volunteer Coordinator would be responsible for developing and implementing a national policy on the management of the volunteer force and would have as a key objective the establishment of the concept of AFS volunteer affiliation as a satisfying long-term and ideally lifelong commitment. The national coordinator would work with regional committees for the establishment in each region of a Regional Volunteer Coordinator who would be able to work harmoniously with the National Volunteer Coordinator and with their respective regional committees. In some of the larger metropolitan areas, it may be appropriate also to appoint Chapter Volunteer Coordinators. However, this may in some cases prove unnecessarily cumbersome, and should be tested further.

The appointment of volunteer coordinators who would apply a great deal of care and attention to the placement of volunteers would without doubt have a positive influence on motivation and efficacy.

5. AFS should clarify its policies and goals.

Each member of the organization should have readily available a concise, clear statement of what AFS is and what it does. A basic statement exists, but it has different titles and some variations in phraseology, and is not instantly accessible to all AFS volunteers. AFS should be able to adapt its statements for different contexts, but there should be one basic statement, under one agreed title, which is both a marketing tool and a point of reference for AFS volunteers.

One example of a policy area that needs clarification concerns the extent to which applicants can nominate countries to which they wish to be sent or at least to nominate countries to which they do not want to be sent. There are significant national and international policy implications in any suggestion that there be more personal scope to nominate or exclude countries of placement. Hence, there is need for a concise policy statement on this specific issue to be circularized to regions and chapters, with the scope for personal choice clearly delineated.

6. AFS should make volunteer training a priority.

Once the National and Regional Volunteer Coordinators are appointed, all efforts should be made to assist them to recruit others as National and Regional Volunteer Training Coordinators, who will report to their respective Volunteer Coordinators. The Regional Volunteer Training Coordinators will have as a key responsibility the provision of advice and assistance to chapters in the selection and induction of Chapter Volunteer Training Coordinators.

AFS volunteers have requested training in such areas as media skills, public speaking, and interviewing skills. Chapter counselors and host families need training on topics such as sexual awareness, child abuse, drug awareness, and adolescent development. In the light of our observations on the need to achieve a greater cultural diversity of membership so that AFS will more truly reflect in its membership the diversity of the Australian population, intercultural learning about contemporary Australian society should be a high priority in any training program, whether at national, regional or local levels. AFS's experience in cross-cultural and intercultural learning should make this a manageable objective. The current needs of the organization make it an essential one.

As the Green Book document on training suggests, there may be scope for volunteer training in association with other volunteer organizations. This is a sensible suggestion, insofar as many of the skills required of AFS volunteers are needed by volunteers in other organizations. If some training and development needs could be catered for in this way, AFS could concentrate its own training resources on developing skills which are needed more specifically in AFS.

7. AFS should develop a corporate identity.

One of the key objectives of AFS should be the development and communication of a corporate identity which will be accepted with pleasure throughout the organization and promoted confidently by all sectors. This objective is crucial for success in a number of areas including volunteer recruitment and fundraising.

We hesitate to raise the matter of the organization's name, as we were given to understand that from the viewpoint of the AFS Board the name, "AFS International Exchanges", has been determined after a lengthy process and is not up for negotiation. However, we are obliged to report that it was normal for non-AFS people to whom we spoke to ask what the "AFS" letters stood for. We believe that even a careful response to the question leaves the impression that the organization is "American" rather than international.

This is apparently not seen as a fundamental problem at the leadership level, but there were indications that it creates a marketing problem at the chapter level. Briefly, the retention of the name and the perceived need to explain it present a problem in that the impression arises that exchange programs will be exclusively or predominantly with the USA. This in turn is said to create problems, especially in some country areas.

We recommend also that AFS appoint an experienced person as general editor of publications, whose responsibilities will include especially the ensuring of a suitable corporate "look" and style for publications. This position could well be filled by a volunteer with the appropriate skills and experience if it is clearly understood that this is a highly responsible and probably demanding position. The publications editor's position should be responsible directly to the National Director, given the necessity for all published material to be completely accurate in matters of policy and procedure and also appropriately presented for the purposes of marketing the organization.

8. AFS should improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its communication.

There is no question that AFS tries hard for effective communication, but there is room for improvement. Recognition of the fact that Australians rely heavily on television

and radio for information of all kinds should prompt AFS to develop a range of audio-visual materials for communication. Video-tapes, audio cassettes, and slide transparency kits would be invaluable tools for the communication of information to volunteers and to the wider community. Such materials would assist chapter chairpersons and the various coordinators to pass on information about procedures and programs. They would also help to enliven information nights and presentations to school students, community organizations, and potential sponsors.

Rural areas are particularly bereft of opportunities to communicate regularly and fully with the AFS national office. To help remedy the situation, we recommend that the Board of AFS give consideration to the installation of a toll-free line to enable its volunteers throughout Australia to communicate with the national office for the cost of a local call. Of course, the real cost will be borne from AFS's national budget, but the provision of this service would also lead in due course to a reduction in the costs incurred in solving problems arising from poor communication.

The placement process is an area in which communication needs considerable streamlining. An often lengthy delay between acceptance and placement contrasts sharply with AFS's stated policy that participants will receive ample advance notification of placement. The current waiting time of sometimes several months is surely very disheartening for the applicant and can only suggest to parents and to other potential AFS volunteers in their community that AFS is a very inefficient organization. The fact that this is an international problem should not preclude AFS Australia from working actively for a solution. We recommend that the problem be addressed as a matter of urgency, in view of the harmful effect which current practice has on volunteer motivation.

A third area of communication problems concerns the aforementioned Green Book, a collection of documents put together in a binder and indexed. We recommend that the Green Book and its individual sections be replaced with small booklets, the most basic of which should be small enough to be carried in a coat pocket or handbag. In this regard we commend for example the set of manuals, some general, some for people in specific roles, produced by the Girl Guides Association of Australia. To accommodate the need for a handbook comprising periodic updates for procedures, current year program dates and so on, a slimmer, modified Green Book could be produced. The task of up-dating and editing the contents of the slimmer Green Book would be more manageable, in that the various sections can be rewritten and edited by different people, thus spreading the workload and ensuring the early availability of the more urgently needed sections. However, in line with our recommendations on the development of a corporate identity, the publications editor would necessarily be responsible for the final editing of all sections of the Green Book.

Another item which lends itself to corporate sponsorship and would, we believe, be appreciated by regional and chapter level personnel (and probably also in the national office), is a spreadsheet year planner, showing the international planning cycle and key target dates. This and similar tools would make it easier for volunteers to organize their work in a responsible and professional manner.

9. AFS should establish a working group of people from the policy, management, and service areas with a view to resolving problems that affect the overall operation of the organization.

It may be appropriate for AFS to consider forming informal, minimally-structured working parties or project teams, comprising people from the three domains (as identified by the "Domain Theory" discussed earlier), to work through key issues, such as fundraising and the provision of information manuals. The formation and operation of such groups will involve a conscious departure from the style of traditional problem-solving procedures, such as a board of directors forming a sub-committee or management preparing a policy-options paper. There should be a clear understanding from the outset that procedures and techniques which work at the national level may not be appropriate at the regional or local level.

10. AFS in Australia should use new strategies to involve Aboriginal people and people of non-English speaking background.

Our consistent impression of the AFS volunteer organization in Australia is of a predominantly Anglo-Celtic group, even though a number of people at various levels of the organization indicated that they would like to see greater diversity of ethnic origin in the volunteer force. When asked about the efforts made to recruit these people as volunteers, responses were variations of two themes: "We invite them but they don't come" and "They don't want their children to go to another country or culture."

It cannot be expected that those Australians who do not share the "cultural baggage" of the Anglo-Celtic group will feel instantly comfortable with the idea of attending an AFS function and participating in the activities of the organization. It will therefore rarely be good enough simply to invite people to come to a function. AFS should find ways to initiate discussions with leaders in the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders, and immigrant ethnic communities. Some help in recruiting volunteers from the non-English speaking background (NESB) community can be obtained from the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia. FECCA and the councils it represents have readily available a great deal of valuable information that they would most likely be willing to share with AFS. Recruitment strategies should also include some

basic information about AFS available in the most commonly used community languages.

It is particularly recommended that NESB Australians be sought as host families. One of the cultural stereotypes that seems to have some validity is that in most or all of the community groups of fairly recent immigrant origin, the integrity of the family unit and the extended family constitute a significant cultural value. While some families may, in fact, be unwilling to have their children travel abroad, there is no reason to suppose that they would therefore be unwilling to open their homes to a student from another country. Once involved as host families, these people could then become involved in other ways as well.